

REMARKS

Reconsideration of the above-captioned patent application is respectfully requested in view of the foregoing amendments and the following remarks.

By the forgoing amendments, claims 8 and 9 have been amended. Thus, claims 2-6, 8, and 9 currently are pending and are subject to examination in the above-captioned patent application.

In the Office Action mailed December 31, 2003, the Examiner objected to claims 8 and 9 as including informalities. Applicants have amended claims 8 and 9 in accordance with the Examiner's suggestions with respect to the informality objections.

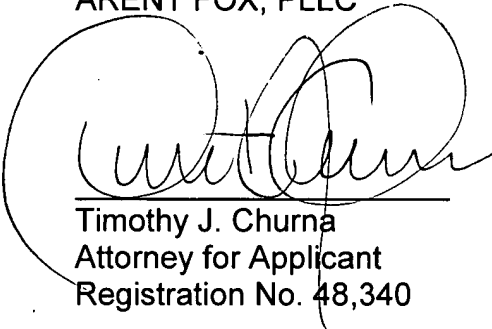
The Examiner also rejected claims 2-6, 8, and 9 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a), as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,268,242 to Williams *et al.* in view of Japanese Patent No. JP-01-144938 ("JP-'938"). To the extent that these rejections remain applicable to the claims, as amended, Applicants hereby traverse these rejections, as follows.

Applicants have amended claims 8 and 9 to clarify that the rings are closed rings. Applicants believe that these amendments overcome the current rejections of claims 2-6, 8, and 9. Specifically, in the Examiner's Interview Summary, the Examiner acknowledges that in neither Williams nor JP-'938 are the rings closed rings. See, e.g., Interview Summary, Page 3, Lines 5, 8, and 9. For example, with respect to Williams, that Examiner acknowledges that such rings are "far from closed," and with respect to JP-'938, the Examiner acknowledges that such rings are "almost closed." Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the outstanding objections and rejections and an issuance of a Notice of Allowance are earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner determine that any further action is necessary to place this application into better form, the Examiner is encouraged to telephone the undersigned representative at the number listed below. Applicants are filing a Petition For Extension of Time with this response, and are enclosing a check in the amount of \$950 covering the requisite large entity fee for a one-month extension of time to respond with such Petition For Extension of Time.

Respectfully submitted,

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